

MANUFACTURING EXTENSION PARTNERSHIP

Success Stories from the Field

Solar Group Inc.

Mississippi Technology Alliance

Solar Group Inc. Seeing Lean Results

Client Profile:

Solar Group, Inc. manufactures a complete line of residential mailboxes, mailbox posts and mailbox accessories in a variety of materials including: brass, satin nickel, cast aluminum, plastic, galvanized steel and cedar. Solar Group began in 1957 as Solar Hardware Company. Early products included door and window hardware and metal adjustable shelving. In 1976 the company began manufacturing home ventilation products under the AMPCOR name. Then in 1982 a new division called Southern Gemini was added to manufacture mailboxes. In 1988 EFI wood fasteners became part of the company's product offering. Solar Group products are marketed throughout the U.S., Canada, Japan, and Germany. In 1998, the Solar Group was acquired by Gibraltar Industries, a leading manufacturer, processor, and distributor of metals and other engineered materials for the building products, vehicular, and other industrial markets. The company serves approximately 10,000 customers in a variety of industries in all 50 states, Canada, Mexico, Europe, Asia, and Central and South America. The Taylorsville, Mississippi plant employs 5 people.

Situation:

Solar employees attended a consortium-based Lean training presented by John Moore, project manager at the Manufacturing Extension Partnership of Mississippi (MEP.ms), a NIST MEP network affiliate, partner, Mississippi State University's Industrial Outreach Service (MSU-IOS). Their experience with the training left Solar requesting additional support services by MEP.ms to help with implementing Lean principles on the plant floor beginning with 5S training and Kaizen events to improve workplace organization.

Solution:

MEP.ms/MSU-IOS project manager, John Moore, conducted a training class in Value Stream Mapping on one of Solar's primary product lines. "We began our efforts by focusing primarily on 5S and on continuing to improve our plant," said Solar's industrial engineer, Tony Holliman. "We held a Kaizen event in the Post Drill Area where we improved the flow, set up a supermarket for raw material and work in progress, and improved the visualization and organization of the area. As a result, we have a documented \$6,000 savings in labor."

Results:

* Realized \$6,000 in cost savings.

Testimonial:

"Solar's mapping process identified areas that need addressing. We are laying the foundations for the future here at Solar."

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Tony Holliman, Industrial Engineer